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### N.J. sees 'insult' in Bush's budget

Officials decry cuts, say they'll hurt all ages

Friday, February 11, 2005

**By Ken Thorbourne**  
 Journal staff writer

President Bush's proposed slow-growth budget has been met with harsh reviews by the elected officials representing New Jersey and Hudson County.

U.S. Sen. Jon Corzine branded the \$2.57 trillion spending plan, which proposes cuts in housing, transportation and homeland security funding for the state, "bad for New Jersey families, bad for seniors and bad for children."

Top-ranking House Democrat Robert Menendez called Bush's proposed budget an "insult" to the "true values of New Jerseyans and the true values of the American people."

To Hudson County Executive Thomas DeGise, the president's trimming of New Jersey's homeland security budget to \$61 million from \$93 million, "smacks of partisan politics."

Bayonne Mayor Joseph V. Doria lashed out at Bush's plan to scale back funding for community policing.

Corzine and Menendez also criticized the president for failing to place in the budget the \$5 billion the nation is spending in Iraq each month, along with the estimated trillion dollars it would cost to transition from a wholly government-run Social Security system to the private investment model Bush is lobbying for.

"The president is simply keeping two sets of books," Corzine said, "the one he submitted, which shows progress on reducing the deficit, and the one which includes the actual costs of the administration's three top priorities - the war in Iraq, privatizing Social Security and making his tax cuts permanent."

White House press spokesman Scott McClellan said the president's budget, which applies to the fiscal year beginning Oct. 1, is a statement about what's important.

"Budgets are about setting priorities," McClellan said. "And you have to work to

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hold the line on spending elsewhere. That's why the president, in his budget, proposed 150 programs for either elimination or significantly being scaled back."

Menendez said he too favors ending wasteful programs, but would prefer to using a surgeon's scalpel to make the cuts, not the meat cleaver he accused the president of wielding. Case in point: the HOPE VI housing program.

For the third year in a row, the president has proposed eliminating the HOPE VI program, which has provided grants totaling over \$389 million in New Jersey - money New Jersey representatives said leveraged an additional \$700 million in private investment. The program rips down and replaces decayed public housing developments.

"I participated in a ribbon-cutting today in Elizabeth for a Hope VI project," Menendez said on Tuesday. "That \$30 million (in HOPE VI money) generated \$110 million in private capital."

Another cut that irked local legislators is the reduction in community block grant money from \$5.7 billion to \$3.8 billion. This money is used for a variety of purposes ranging from sprucing up commercial strips to building affordable housing.

The state received \$113 million in CDBG grants last year, they said.

"New Jersey residents stand to lose \$40 million from just the CDBG cut," Corzine said. Bayonne depends on more than \$2 million in CDBG money annually for street-paving, home rehabilitation, and providing social services, Doria said.

Held up as a spending boondoggle, the commuter line Amtrak is zeroed out in the proposed budget, although \$360 million is kept in to maintain commuter service that uses Amtrak tracks in the Northeast corridor if the railroad goes bankrupt.

The cut demonstrates a lack of understanding by the administration, Menendez said, as to how much businesses in region depend on Amtrak to bring people into the region.

Even though Republicans control Congress, Menendez held out hope for Democrats negotiating a better budget deal.

"Republicans in various parts of the country have been objecting to this," he said, citing opposition to the president's cut of farming subsidies. "I think there will be plenty of opportunity for coalition building, even across party lines."

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